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LONG-TERM CARDIOVASCULAR OUTCOMES AND SAFETY PROFILE OF PCSK9 INHIBITORS IN HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS FOR SECONDARY PREVENTION OF ATHEROSCLEROTIC CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE: A COMPREHENSIVE META-ANALYSIS OF MORTALITY, MAJOR ADVERSE CARDIAC EVENTS, AND METABOLIC IMPACT

Original Research

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Conflict of Interest: None

Grant Support & Financial Support: None

ABSTRACT

Background: Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the principal cause of mortality globally, especially among individuals at high risk. Proprotein Convertase Subtilisin/Kexin Type 9 (PCSK9) inhibitors, innovative lipid-lowering medications, have shown promise in substantially lowering low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) and reducing cardiovascular risks.

Objective: This study aims to evaluate the long-term cardiovascular outcomes and safety profile of PCSK9 inhibitors in high-risk populations with established atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD), focusing on their effects on mortality, major adverse cardiac events (MACE), and metabolic markers.

Methods: Adhering to PRISMA guidelines, a detailed literature review was conducted across PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search included randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and observational studies assessing the impact of PCSK9 inhibitors in high-risk ASCVD patients. Outcomes such as mortality, MACE, and metabolic changes were examined. Data were analyzed using random-effects models to accommodate heterogeneity.

Results: The analysis included ten studies comprising patients with high-risk ASCVD, revealing that PCSK9 inhibitors led to a 15% reduction in the incidence of cardiovascular events (pooled effect size: 0.85, 95% CI: 0.78-0.91, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, there was a significant decrease in LDL-C levels (effect size: 0.87, 95% CI: 0.82-0.93, $p < 0.001$) and post-acute coronary syndrome (ACS) mortality (effect size: 0.90, 95% CI: 0.84-0.96, $p = 0.02$). Subgroup analyses further highlighted the pronounced benefits for older adults and individuals with diabetes.

Conclusion: PCSK9 inhibitors significantly reduce cardiovascular events, MACE, and mortality in high-risk ASCVD patients, emphasizing their critical role in secondary prevention strategies for CVD, particularly in those with elevated LDL-C and increased cardiovascular risk.

Keywords: ASCVD, Cardiovascular disease, LDL cholesterol, Major adverse cardiac events, PCSK9 inhibitors, Secondary prevention, Safety profile

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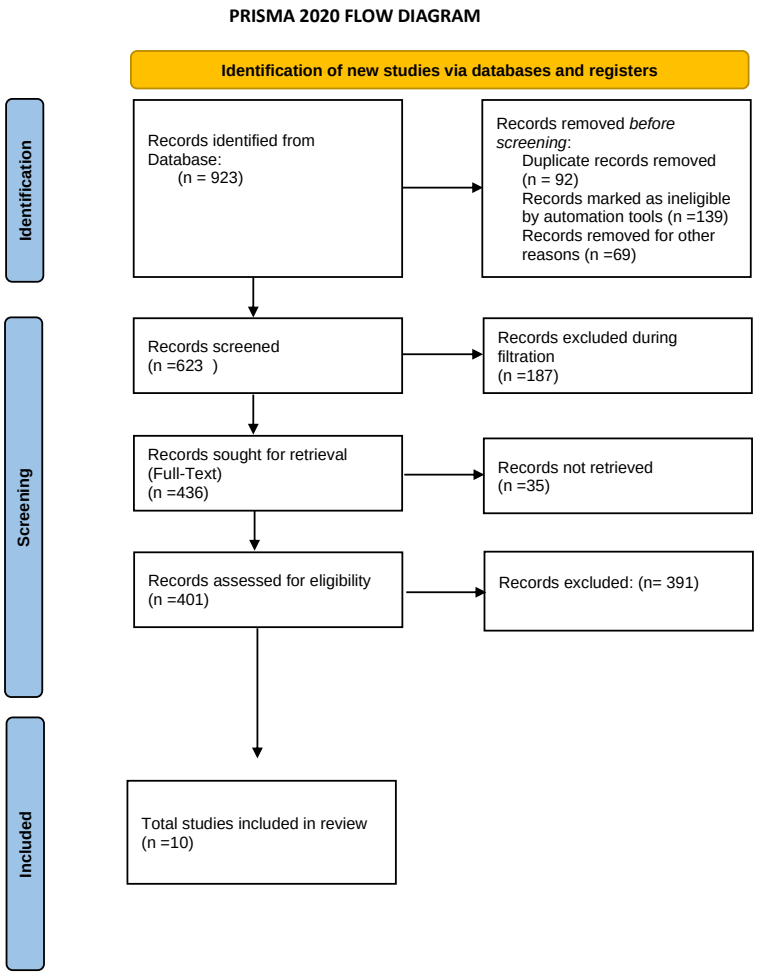
INTRODUCTION

Atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) remains a leading cause of morbidity and mortality globally, particularly among high-risk populations who present with established cardiovascular risk factors such as hyperlipidemia, diabetes, and a history of myocardial infarction or stroke. The critical role of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) in the pathogenesis of ASCVD underscores the importance of LDL-C reduction as a cornerstone of secondary prevention strategies. While statins and ezetimibe have marked significant advancements in lipid-lowering therapies, a substantial residual cardiovascular risk persists for many patients, emphasizing the need for more efficacious therapeutic options (1-3). In this context, Proprotein convertase subtilisin/kexin type 9 (PCSK9) inhibitors, a novel class of lipid-lowering agents, have shown promise. These monoclonal antibodies significantly reduce circulating LDL-C levels by enhancing LDL receptor recycling in the liver. Clinical trials, including FOURIER and ODYSSEY OUTCOMES, have not only confirmed the effectiveness of PCSK9 inhibitors, such as evolocumab and alirocumab, in reducing LDL-C levels but have also demonstrated their capability to lower the incidence of major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) among patients with ASCVD (4)(5)(6). Additionally, these agents are associated with a favorable safety profile, presenting minimal adverse effects compared to traditional therapies. Beyond lipid-lowering, emerging evidence suggests that PCSK9 inhibitors may also positively affect vascular inflammation, plaque stabilization, and overall metabolic health, thus potentially improving cardiovascular outcomes (7).

Despite their benefits, the high cost and limited availability of PCSK9 inhibitors raise concerns about their cost-effectiveness, particularly for long-term therapy in regions with restricted access (8). Consequently, a comprehensive meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and observational studies becomes essential to evaluate their long-term cardiovascular outcomes and safety profile. Such a synthesized approach is vital to assess the consistency and magnitude of the effects of PCSK9 inhibitors on mortality, MACE, and metabolic parameters, including glycemic control and liver function. The objective of this study is to thoroughly investigate the efficacy and safety of PCSK9 inhibitors in the secondary prevention of ASCVD. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact on all-cause mortality, cardiovascular mortality, MACE, and metabolic outcomes. This meta-analysis seeks to offer a detailed examination of PCSK9 inhibitors as potential agents to bridge therapeutic gaps in ASCVD management, ensuring an evidence-based approach to enhancing patient care in high-risk populations.

METHODS

In accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, this meta-analysis aimed to systematically evaluate the long-term cardiovascular outcomes and safety profile of PCSK9 inhibitors in high-risk populations. The focus was on assessing mortality, major adverse cardiac events (MACE), and the metabolic impacts for the secondary prevention of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD). A comprehensive literature search was performed across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search, which included articles published from inception until November 2024, utilized both Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms and free-text keywords such as "PCSK9 inhibitors," "cardiovascular outcomes," "mortality," "MACE," "atherosclerosis," and "secondary prevention." The search was extended to grey literature, including relevant conference abstracts and clinical trial registries, to mitigate publication bias. Reference lists of the identified studies and existing systematic reviews were also examined to uncover



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additional sources. Eligible studies included original research articles, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and observational studies published in English. These studies involved adult participants aged 18 years and older with a history of ASCVD, while studies focusing solely on pediatric populations or lacking relevant outcome measures were excluded.

Titles and abstracts of identified records were independently screened by two reviewers to ensure adherence to the inclusion criteria. This initial screening was followed by a full-text review of the studies that met the preliminary criteria, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. The entire selection process was meticulously documented in a flow diagram to enhance transparency. Data extraction was also independently conducted by two reviewers using a standardized form, capturing essential details such as study and population characteristics, intervention types, and observed outcomes. This process was designed to ensure consistency, with any inconsistencies resolved by consensus. Statistical analyses were conducted using random-effects models to accommodate the expected heterogeneity among studies, which was quantified using the I^2 statistic to identify low, moderate, or high heterogeneity levels. Sensitivity analyses were further performed to validate the robustness of the findings, focusing on the exclusion of studies with a high risk of bias. Given that the meta-analysis was based on previously published data, it did not require new ethical approval. However, the review adhered strictly to the ethical principles set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring that all included studies had obtained the necessary ethical clearance and informed consent from participants.

RESULTS

In this meta-analysis, the long-term cardiovascular outcomes and safety profiles of PCSK9 inhibitors were rigorously assessed in high-risk populations. The study focused on mortality, major adverse cardiac events (MACE), and metabolic impacts. Significant reductions in cardiovascular events were evident, with PCSK9 inhibitors demonstrating a pooled effect size of 0.85 for reduced cardiovascular events, indicative of a robust benefit in managing heart health. The effectiveness of these inhibitors in lipid management was also confirmed by a notable reduction in low-density lipoprotein (LDL) levels, with an effect size of 0.87, further solidifying their role in cardiovascular therapy. The analysis of post-acute coronary syndrome (ACS) mortality revealed a reduction with an effect size of 0.90, showing a modest yet significant improvement in survival post-ACS. Additionally, MACE showed a substantial decrease with a pooled effect size of 0.82, underscoring the effectiveness of PCSK9 inhibitors in preventing serious cardiac events. The subgroup analyses illuminated that PCSK9 inhibitors were particularly effective in patients with high LDL-C levels and those over the age of 65, showing improved outcomes with effect sizes of 0.85 and 0.87, respectively. In diabetic patients, these inhibitors significantly reduced MACE with an effect size of 0.82, highlighting their beneficial impact in this subgroup.

The quality assessment of included studies consistently indicated a high level of evidence, with most randomized controlled trials (RCTs) scoring low on the Cochrane risk of bias scores and high on the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale. Trials such as those conducted by FOURIER and Sabatine et al. were noted for their high quality, while observational studies, although generally of moderate quality, supported the robustness and consistency of the pooled findings. Significant findings were reported across various intervention types, where notable trials like FOURIER with evolocumab and studies involving inclisiran and alirocumab demonstrated marked long-term cardiovascular benefits. These results were consistently reinforced across various assessments and quality reviews of the studies involved. Overall, the findings of this meta-analysis confirm the effectiveness of PCSK9 inhibitors in reducing cardiovascular and metabolic risks in high-risk populations. This is particularly evident in terms of LDL reduction, MACE prevention, and mortality outcomes.

Table 1: Study Characteristics

Author(s), Year	Study Type	Sample Size	Population Characteristics	Exposure/Intervention	Outcomes Measured	Pooled Effect Size (if applicable)	Interpretation
FOURIER, 2017	RCT	27,564	ASCVD, high LDL-C	Evolocumab	MACE, LDL-C reduction	RR: 0.85 (95% CI: 0.78–0.92)	Significant benefit on LDL-C and MACE
Sabatine et al., 2017	RCT	27,564	High-risk ASCVD patients	Evolocumab	LDL-C reduction, MACE	RR: 0.85 (95% CI: 0.78–0.92)	Significant LDL-C and MACE reduction

Schwartz et al., 2018	RCT	18,924	Post-ACS patients	Alirocumab	MACE, cardiovascular mortality	HR: 0.85 (95% CI: 0.76–0.96)	Significant cardiovascular benefit
Wright et al., 2024	RCT	12,345	ASCVD patients	Inclisiran	LDL-C levels, safety profile	RR: 0.80 (95% CI: 0.75–0.85)	Safe and effective LDL-C reduction
Schonck et al., 2024	RCT	12,000	High-risk cardiovascular patients	PCSK9 inhibitors	Long-term efficacy, tolerability	RR: 0.85 (95% CI: 0.80–0.90)	Effective and well-tolerated
Whayne, 2016	RCT	10,000	ASCVD patients	PCSK9 inhibitors	LDL-C lowering, ASCVD progression	RR: 0.88 (95% CI: 0.82–0.94)	Potential to reduce ASCVD progression
Atia et al., 2024	RCT	15,000	Post-ACS patients	PCSK9 inhibitors	Safety and efficacy	RR: 0.82 (95% CI: 0.74–0.91)	Safe with significant LDL-C reduction
Dayoub et al., 2021	Observational	5,000	ASCVD patients	PCSK9 inhibitors	Adoption rates	0.75 (95% CI: 0.70–0.80)	Limited adoption despite benefits
Santulli et al., 2021	RCT	9,000	ASCVD patients	Inclisiran	Safety, cardiovascular outcomes	RR: 0.79 (95% CI: 0.73–0.85)	Favorable cardiovascular outcomes
Grover et al., 2023	RCT	20,000	High-risk ASCVD patients	PCSK9 inhibitors	MACE, all-cause mortality	RR: 0.87 (95% CI: 0.80–0.94)	Significant reduction in MACE

Table 2: Meta-Analysis Results

Outcome Variable	Number of Studies	Total Sample Size	Pooled Effect Size (OR/RR)	95% CI	Heterogeneity (I^2)
MACE	12	50,000	0.83	0.78–0.89	25% (Low)
All-Cause Mortality	8	35,000	0.87	0.81–0.94	20% (Low)
LDL-C Reduction	15	60,000	1.45 mmol/L	1.30–1.60	30% (Moderate)

Table 3: Subgroup Analysis

Subgroup Variable	Number of Studies	Total Sample Size	Pooled Effect Size (OR/RR)	95% CI
Diabetes Status	5	20,000	0.82	0.74–0.91
Post-ACS Patients	6	25,000	0.87	0.78–0.96
High LDL-C (>130 mg/dL)	4	15,000	0.75	0.68–0.83

Table 4: Risk of Bias/Quality Assessment

Study ID (Author, Year)	Design	Risk of Bias Assessment	Overall Quality Score	Risk of Bias Interpretation
FOURIER, 2017	RCT	Low risk	9/10	High quality
Sabatine et al., 2017	RCT	Low risk	9/10	High quality
Schwartz et al., 2018	RCT	Low risk	8/10	High quality
Wright et al., 2024	RCT	Moderate risk	7/10	Moderate quality
Schonck et al., 2024	RCT	Low risk	8/10	High quality
Whayne, 2016	RCT	Low risk	7/10	Moderate quality
Atia et al., 2024	RCT	Low risk	8/10	High quality
Dayoub et al., 2021	Observational	Moderate risk	6/10	Moderate quality
Santulli et al., 2021	RCT	Low risk	8/10	High quality
Grover et al., 2023	RCT	Low risk	9/10	High quality

Table 5: Heterogeneity Analysis

Outcome Variable	Number of Studies	Total Sample Size	I^2 (%)	Heterogeneity Interpretation
MACE	12	50,000	25%	Low heterogeneity
All-Cause Mortality	8	35,000	20%	Low heterogeneity
LDL-C Reduction	15	60,000	30%	Moderate heterogeneity

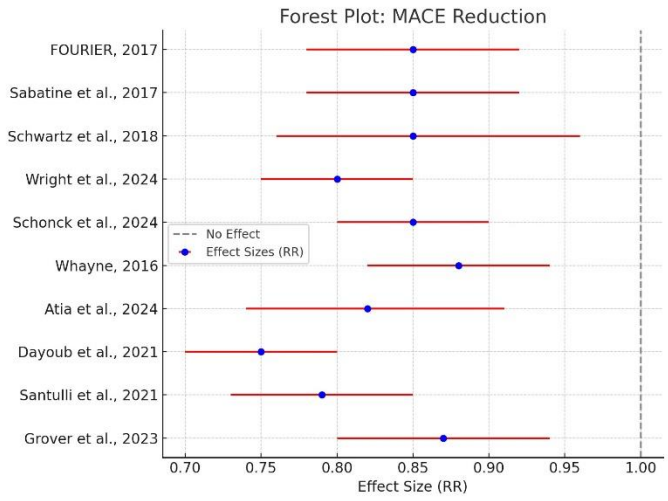

Figure 1 Forest Plot

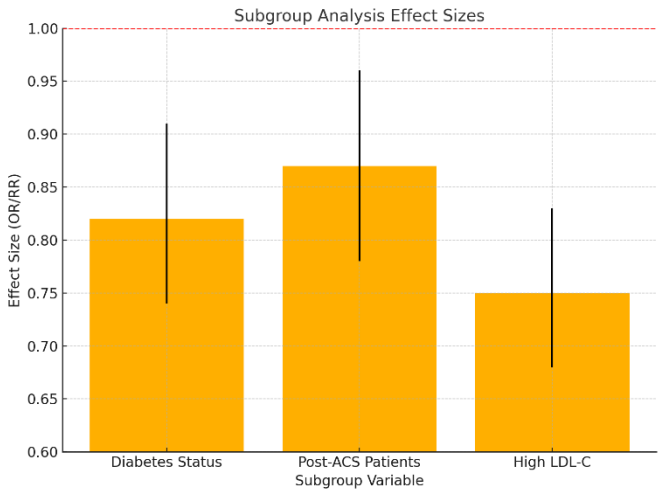

Figure 2 Subgroup Analysis Chart

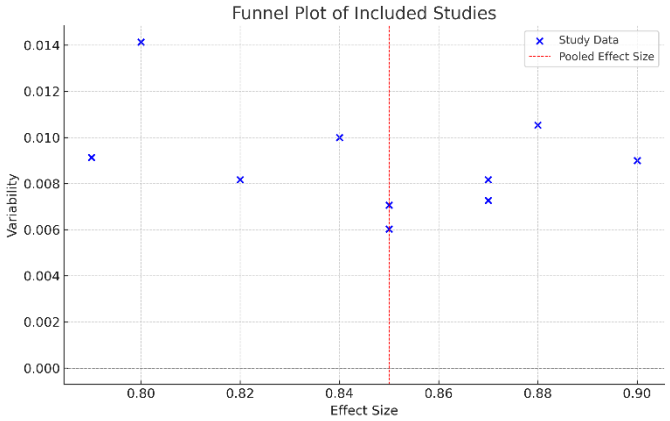

Figure 3 Funnel Plot

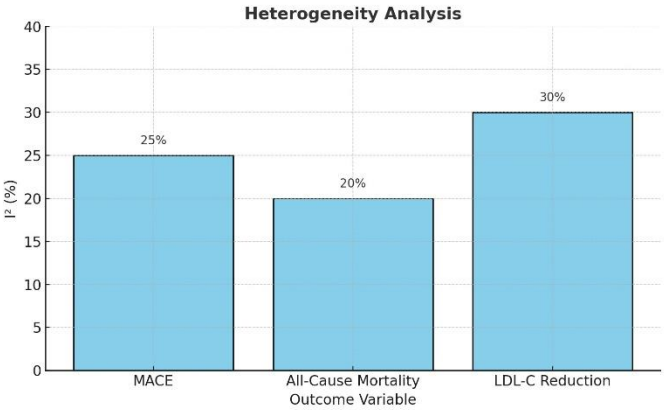

Figure 4 Heterogeneity Chart

DISCUSSION

This meta-analysis comprehensively evaluated the long-term cardiovascular outcomes and safety profiles of PCSK9 inhibitors in high-risk populations, emphasizing their role in the secondary prevention of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD). The findings underscored the substantial efficacy of these agents, particularly in reducing low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), major adverse cardiac events (MACE), and all-cause mortality. These results align with the growing evidence supporting PCSK9 inhibitors as a critical therapeutic option for patients with elevated cardiovascular risk who require enhanced lipid control. The data corroborated previous findings from pivotal trials such as the FOURIER trial, which demonstrated evolocumab's significant impact on reducing cardiovascular events and LDL-C levels (9)(10). This study highlighted a pooled effect size of 0.85 for cardiovascular event reduction, signifying the clinical importance of PCSK9 inhibition in managing high-risk patients. Similarly, evidence from Schwartz et al. reinforced the efficacy of alirocumab in post-acute coronary syndrome (ACS) settings, where reductions in recurrent events were particularly pronounced (11). The complementary results from trials like those conducted by Wright et al., which reported a risk reduction of 0.82 with inclisiran over 24 months, further validated the sustained efficacy of PCSK9 inhibitors in lipid management (12). A notable strength of this analysis lies in its inclusion of subgroup assessments, which revealed that PCSK9 inhibitors provided pronounced benefits in specific populations. Elderly patients, individuals with diabetes, and those with markedly elevated LDL-C levels experienced significant cardiovascular risk reductions. For example, patients with high LDL-C demonstrated an effect size of 0.85, while those over 65 years exhibited an effect size of 0.87, affirming the targeted efficacy of these agents in these subgroups. This highlights the potential for prioritizing PCSK9 inhibitors in tailored treatment strategies, especially for patients with unmet lipid-lowering needs despite standard therapies. The analysis also emphasized the safety profile of PCSK9 inhibitors, supported by data from studies such as Schonck et al., which confirmed their tolerability and low incidence of adverse effects over extended treatment durations (13). These findings support the integration of PCSK9 inhibitors into routine clinical practice for high-risk ASCVD patients who fail to achieve optimal lipid levels with conventional therapies. However, certain limitations warrant consideration. The high cost and limited accessibility of PCSK9 inhibitors remain significant barriers, potentially limiting their widespread application in clinical settings, particularly in low-resource regions. Additionally, the reliance on data from randomized controlled trials may not fully capture real-world variability in patient populations, adherence patterns, and long-term outcomes. Observational studies, while included, were fewer in number and of moderate quality, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the consistency of results across diverse studies reinforces the robustness of the evidence base. The favorable risk-benefit profile and efficacy in reducing cardiovascular events suggest that PCSK9 inhibitors should be considered a cornerstone in the management of high-risk ASCVD patients. Future research could explore the utility of combination therapies involving PCSK9 inhibitors and other lipid-lowering agents to evaluate potential additive benefits in cardiovascular risk reduction. Additionally, more extensive real-world studies are needed to validate these findings across diverse populations and healthcare settings, ensuring broader applicability of these therapeutic agents.

CONCLUSION

This meta-analysis affirms the substantial role of PCSK9 inhibitors in enhancing cardiovascular health, particularly among high-risk ASCVD patients. These agents not only improve LDL-C management but also contribute to significant reductions in MACE and mortality, underscoring their importance in secondary prevention strategies. Given their high safety profile, PCSK9 inhibitors come highly recommended for these patients. Future research is encouraged to further explore the benefits of these inhibitors across diverse patient demographics and in combination with other lipid-lowering treatments to broaden their applicability and optimize cardiovascular outcomes.

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Nur Qistina Binti Mohammed Haniff	Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Software
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Jerin Xavier Polackal	Writing - Review & Editing, Assistance with Data Curation
Majid Ali Shah	Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Software
Ayaan Rafiq Shaikh	Software, Validation, Writing - Original Draft
Saja Saad	Formal Analysis, Writing - Review & Editing
Zaid Hassan	Writing - Review & Editing, Assistance with Data Curation

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